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January 14th, 2009

TO: Members of the Senate Taxation Committee

FROM: Concetta Marie Eckel,

RE: Support of SB 115- Simplify income calculations for certain property tax assistance programs

SENATE TAXATION
EXHIBIT NO. 4
DATE 1.14.09
BILL NO. SB115

Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Concetta Marie Eckel. I volunteer for a non-profit organization which helps Montanans prepare their taxes. Each year we see people react to the very provisions in this bill.

While we are sympathetic of the need to simplify the income calculations for the tax programs, that is not our main focus in this bill. This bill rectifies a major problem with the Low-Income Property Tax Assistance Program by changing the date that it is due from March 15th to April 15th.

Tax-Aide volunteers frequently run into the problem of someone who qualifies for this property tax assistance but miss the March 15th deadline. Often people do not do their taxes until right up at the deadline, and often these are the people who need low-income assistance programs. At the same time, in the interest of fairness, why should someone who has their taxes prepared on March 16th –not qualifying for this assistance –be treated differently than someone who files prior to the cutoff date? The March 15th cutoff made qualified people ineligible for the assistance that was specifically meant for them, and the change to April 15th is much needed and very much appreciated.

Once again, this relatively small change major real world impact for low-income Montanans, and I strongly urge you to support this bill and that provision. Tough economic times will make this assistance more important for people on fixed incomes. Thank you.